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ABSTRACT

Some basic problems of current lower-division foreign language instruction are discussed from the standpoint of real-life language use, and specific measures for meeting some of the problems are suggested for learning German as a second language. Some of the significant discrepancies between the use of a language in real life and in the language class concern the following issues: the extent to which language use in the classroom is capable of transferral to real-life use; the role of the first-language habits and decoding strategies in second language learning; how to sequence and subdivide the presentation of learning tasks; the presentation of sentences in language exercises so that the context and situation of occurrence are known; the role of rules, non-logical criteria for the application of rules, and interference from the first language habits; and the personal nature of language use, which contrasts to the structuring and timing of study areas in the classroom. An adequate investigation of the difficulties for Americans learning German demands a detailed comparative description of the two languages. It would be desirable to coordinate foreign language with English instruction; illustrations of English and German sentences are presented. The advantages of computer-assisted instruction are outlined. (SW)

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METHODOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE TEACHING OF GERMAN

[Summary. Some basic problems of current lower-division foreign language instruction are discussed from the standpoint of real-life language use. With German as a second language, I suggest some specific measures for meeting certain problems.]

Independently of such variables as the dedication of teachers and students or the course materials in use, the task of teaching and learning foreign languages in the United States is growing steadily more difficult. This is substantially due to a shift in the background and training of students, and to some extent, of teachers. Firstly, the entry of (linguistically) discriminated segments of the population into the university tends to increase the variety of dialects of English. This puts some students at a disadvantage when the first language of instruction is Standard English. Secondly, extensive exposure to mass media has eroded the average American's ability to assume non-passive roles in communication. Literature, for instance, is a basically incomplete medium, as Wolfgang Iser (1970) in particular has demonstrated. The reader is expected to supply some of the content himself, and when dealing with modern literature, often to perform complicated organizational and associative tasks. In contrast, viewers of film or TV have to supply next to nothing. Not only is each scene and sequence fully revealed, the sound track and the camera perspective even relieve the viewer from deciding what to listen to and look at. Small wonder if students raised on film and TV lack the concentration to interact with literature. The success of English writing courses is also severely limited by media passivization.

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Language is itself a very special phenomenon. In a technological age, the average person uses many devices and systems without fully or even partially understanding how they function, and there seems to be nothing strange about treating language the same. But when it comes to repairing the system (as in remedial English) or to modifying it (as in second language learning), some knowledge of functions is essential. No student can follow, let alone devise, a learning strategy, if the task is not clearly defined.

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Thus, being ignorant of how language works is not a convenience at all, but a source of vastly increased labor. Traditional grammar at least provided some insights into structures and systems, though neither very accurate nor complete by modern standards. Second-language learning involved vast amounts of rote memory work, but prior to the advent of mass media, students were better equipped to perform it. Today, the success of traditional grammar under prevailing conditions is so slight that many schools have abandoned it. Pending the advent of a modern, effective grammar for the schools, the language teacher feels as if trying to build on sand.

It may be argued that languages are still being learned by children, although the task of first-language acquisition is as difficult as ever. But this is not immediately relevant, since the child can depend on its environment for illustration and feedback. Moreover, there are a number of significant discrepancies between the use of any language in real life and in a language class:

1) It is by no means settled to what extent language use in a classroom setting is capable of transferral to real-life use. Curriculum planners are generally too optimistic on this score. In particular, real-life language use is not the conscious application of specific rules, but more often the quasi-automatic, habit-directed production of utterances; grammatical and semantic systems are subordinated to some intent to communicate. The best the classroom can do, given current limitations of time and personnel, is to present and demonstrate rules (which it would be more appropriate, though less convenient, to call 'regularities' or 'conventions'). Environmental reinforcement cannot be provided in the necessary quantity.

2) In such a learning situation, it is improbable that the learner's first language can be banned from the classroom. The audio-visual method, with its simplistic Skinnerean basis, assumed that it sufficed to not use the first language: if the stimulus were absent, the response would not occur. Recent research in psycholinguistics indicates that stimulus-response models are not adequate to account for many processes of language acquisition and use. Even the easiest skill of foreign language learning, namely

understanding, is so complex psychologically that it could hardly be performed without recourse to the first-language habits and decoding strategies. Whether one chooses to believe that the hearer merely applies the rules of his grammar backwards to understand an utterance (the analysis-by-analysis theory), or that the hearer mentally reconstructs the message himself, matching his predictions against incoming elements (the analysis-by-synthesis theory, elaborated especially by Neisser 1967), it is hardly realistic to expect that the learner can adopt the rules and strategies of the second language at a barely conscious level. The problem is not changed if we assume, together with proponents of generative grammar, that utterances are understood by means of reference to the basic structures from which they are derived (the derivational complexity theory, cf. Fodor, Bever and Garrett 1974:320ff.). The fact remains that the student decodes on the basis of his first-language strategies. Thus reading is a consistently simpler task than understanding speech, since one is not dependent upon short-term memory. The easy recoverability of the original message allows for the necessary shiftings of gears. The same applies for the relationship of writing to speaking.

3) While real-life language use is a complex and simultaneous interplay of factors, the instructor is obliged to break it into a series of sub-tasks suitable for isolated sequential presentation. This strongly suggests that, at any given stage of instruction, certain factors will be fresh in the mind, while others are weak or forgotten. As available textbooks attest, there is no universal consensus about the best sequence of presentation. The textbook authors are more concerned about commercially attractive layouts. For example, it is obvious that not all factors of languages are equally complicated and difficult to acquire. But textbook authors continue to perpetrate the myth of equally long chapters with the same number of exercises for complex as for simple topics. What material there is tends to be an exposition of forms, as if they were an art in themselves, with little

attempt to explain why the native speaker would select these particular forms to communicate certain information (a laudable exception is Lohnes and Strothmann 1973). This is patently unlike language use in real life.

4) The largest unit usually used for analysis or production is the sentence. Despite inclusions of reading selections and dialogues, textbooks hardly discuss the mechanisms that unite sentences in a text. This deficit may be inherited from the field of linguistics, which, until recently, was subject to a similar restriction. But surely sentences do not occur in isolation, without regard to their context and situation of occurrence. The form and meaning of the single sentence are sensitive both to what has been said (or written) before, and to what the speaker (writer) and hearer (reader) presumably know about the world. This is a major shortcoming which is evident when a student leaves the language class and visits the foreign country.

5) We have all observed in recent times an enigmatic proliferation of the so-called 'stupid error,' being the failure to apply some rule or regularity that the student knows perfectly well, or at least, has demonstrated his knowledge of. These errors are not, of course, due to stupidity, and not only to carelessness. In the first place, the habits of the first language interfere, and, for the reasons expounded under 2) above, more in using the spoken than the written medium. For example, the American speaker, under the influence of the typical subject-verb-object sequence of English, uses object pronouns even after intransitive verbs, as in 'It's them.' Not surprisingly, we find many sentences like 'Das ist den Hund'---even after we have repeatedly explained why this is not acceptable.

In the second place, real-life language use, being habit-directed and spontaneous, differs markedly from classroom second-language use, which relies on constant conscious attention to systems. Errors like the above arise when the second type is involuntarily contaminated by the first. For instance, the student is not generally aware that English has cases, because inflectional systems have

largely yielded to syntactic position as an indicator of case. Nonetheless, the English pronoun distinguishes subject from object, at least. The student unwittingly generalizes the object form after verbs, being an English habit, onto German to produce 'Das ist den Hund.' Also, German syntax is often violated when the English speaker tries to employ it as an indicator of case, while special resistance occurs to un-English sequences of German, such as a sentence beginning with direct or indirect object. The less the time that is available for the production of second-language utterances, and the more the student's attention is distracted by other factors (such as idiomatic language), the greater the likelihood that he will fall under the influence of automatic first-language habits. The result is errors that amaze the student himself as soon as they are pointed out.

In the third place, a native speaker has not only internalized a set of rules, but a set of criteria telling when and in which order to apply them. A second-language learner may acquire and employ the former, but not the latter. The problem of focus is very acute here. Just as a focus on verbs will lead to carelessness about the nominal system of the second language, a focus on one rule may eclipse another. For instance, the accusative is used with a certain large class of prepositions to indicate entering a new space, while the dative shows containment or fixed position. This rule often overrides the non-logical convention that certain smaller classes of prepositions always take one case only. Then 'aus' appears with the accusative, and 'um' with the dative. In this example, over-generalization is aggravated by the juxtaposition of a logical and of a purely conventional rule, that is, of two different planes. The second-language learner will probably find the logical rule easier to internalize.

6) Language use in real life is a highly personal matter. Despite the pervasive influence of mass media language, a certain amount of indivualism has remained, especially since language use is related to complex psychological factors of a person's background. However, classroom organization is dependent upon

proceeding at a fixed rate. That means a very inefficient utilization of the already limited class time. It also reduces the motivation of those who require either more or less than average time to work. The diversity of dialect and background mentioned above intensifies this difficulty.

Even such a brief discussion as the above should show how otiose it is to demand that teachers and students simply 'work harder.' Time, effort and materials could be better invested in adapting the teaching/learning process in planned response to the problems stated above. To use the terminology of the 'system approach' (Kaufmann 1972:29ff.), the solution strategies must be implemented according to the specific analysis of each problem.

An adequate investigation of the difficulties for Americans learning German demands a detailed comparative description of the two languages. It would be logical to turn to linguistics. From time to time, linguists advance new proposals for second-language teaching, according to whatever theory is dominant at the time. Thus Charles C. Fries (1945) relies on 'immediate constituents', William C. Ritchie (1967) on generative grammar, and Don L. Nilsen (1971) on case grammar. Such studies usually have the drawback that the linguist is committed to only one mode of language discription, which is merely assumed to be complete by itself. By now it is evident that certain important aspects of language use are beyond the reach of each and every grammar so far constructed. A teaching method committed to only one of them would soon be obsolete. It seems best, therfore, to accept as a unifying organizational principle the concept that language, in all its manifestations, is a means to communicate, and in particular, to convey, explicitly or implicitly, certain information. To the extent that we can present aspects of grammar with special attention to their communicative value, we will lessen the gap between language use in the classroom and in real-life. Such an objective will be worth the additional effort, granted that most available textbooks

are not oriented in this direction.

Thus the overall consideration for comparative analysis of English and German would basically be: in what similar or different ways do the two languages convey and organize aspects of information?

It is clear at the outset that it would be highly desirable to co-ordinate foreign language with English instruction, such that students become aware of how their own native language performs this task. In another study (Beaugrande 1976) I have tried to describe an English writing course that pursues this objective, showing in particular how new and old information are distributed in, or 'mapped onto', a simple expository text. Besides, having learned a first language is a considerable mental achievement: why not build upon it by consciously relating the communicative systems of the second language to those of the first? Following a suggestion of Zellig S. Harris (1954), one could speak of a 'transfer-grammar' as a plan for using the stored data of one language to assist in the acquisition and performance of another. Surely such a plan would greatly reduce the worries of the individual student. For one thing, recent psycholinguistic research suggests that second-language performance will be filtered through first-language-based cognitive mechanisms anyway, as I have mentioned. It is therefore essential to recognize and anticipate the results of such filtering. It is useful for error prediction and distribution of focus onto the most needed aspects. The student needs to know more about his errors than that they are wrong, and something else is right: he should understand why the errors occur, often in spite of what he has already learned.

The importance of comparative or contrastive study should be obvious. But only recently has an extensive study of English and German begun to appear (Nickel et al. 1968-73, 7 vols.). There is still disagreement about what type of grammar to use (cf. Coseriu 1972 for a discussion), just as linguistic theories continue to evolve. I would like to offer some brief illustrations, showing why contrastive

studies must go beyond the obvious formal differences like case inflections and syntax, such as were accessible to traditional grammars and linguistic theories.

For one thing, the usual distinctions between the four inflectional cases of German cannot capture the different semantic relationships of sentences. The notion that the subject instigates some action and the direct object (or the dative object) receives it, is too limited. Consider an English sentence and its literal, not acceptable German transliteration:

(1) This bet won us a lot of money.
(2) *Diese Wette gewann uns viel Geld.

What acts as the grammatical subject is in fact not the instigator of the action, but rather the means by which the action was accomplished; in case grammar, one would speak of the 'instrumental' case. German is more likely to express means with prepositions, allowing the logical subject to be the grammatical subject as well:

(3) Durch [or Mit] diese[r] Wette gewannen wir viel Geld.

This method of description, by co-ordinating grammar and logical meaning, alerts the students to what we usually call a stylistic difference between languages. It is then obvious why (5) and (8) should be replaced by (6) and (9):

(4) This ad will sell us a lot of soap.
(5) *Diese Reklame verkauft uns viel Seife.
(6) Mit dieser Reklame verkaufen wir viel Seife.

(7) The accident killed four people.
(8) *Der Unfall brachte vier Menschen ums Leben.
(9) Durch den Umfall kamen vier Menschen ums Leben.

These examples, suggested by Günter Rohdenburg, allow us to focus on a certain regularity in organizing information. Similarly, German tends to use expressions of location, i.e. the 'locative' case, less often in subject position than English:

(10) The room seats two hundred people.
(11) *Der Saal setzt zweihundert Menschen.
(12) Im Saal können zweihundert Menschen sitzen.

It is likely that sentences like (5), (8) and (11) would crop up in composition and stylistics classes. It would be uneconomic to treat them in isolation.

Another illustration is a procedure for negating sentences. In designing this procedure, I realized that English affords a basis for negating German sentences, notwithstanding the wholly different types of English negation. The steps are as follows:

a) if the sentence has the order subject-verb-object or objects, NICHT follows all:

S . V . (direct or dative object, or both)$_{optional}$. NICHT.

b) sentences of type a) allow for replacing the subject with one of the objects. e.g.:

O . V . S . (another O)$_{optional}$. NICHT.

c) if, in the not negatied version, S or O would be preceded by the indefinite article, or by no article at all, KEIN__ is inserted before the S or O and NICHT is usually not employed.

d) if the sentence contains more than just S, V, and O (plus their attendant articles and adjectives), then:

aa) translate the not-negated version into English, and determine the intonational high point.

bb) place NICHT in front of the corresponding unit(prepositional phrase being an indivisible unit) of the German sentence.

Illustrations:

Step a): Er gibt dem Mann das Buch NICHT.

Step b): Das Buch geb ich ihm NICHT.

Step c): Er gibt dem Mann ein Buch. ---- Er gibt dem Mann KEIN Buch.
Wir trinken Bier. Wir trinken KEIN Bier.

Step d): Wir fahren morgen nach Berlin.

aa): We're driving to Berlín tomorrow. (typical English intonation)

bb): Wir fahren morgen NICHT nach Berlin

further examples: Das Kind läuft aus dem Haus heraus.

aa): The child runs out of the house.

bb): Das Kind läuft NICHT aus dem Haus heraus.

Sie sind nach dem Sturm in die Stadt gefahren.

aa):They drove into town after the storm.

bb): Sie sind NICHT nach dem Stunm in die Stadt gefahren.

Nach dem Sturm sind sie in die Stadt gefahren.

aa): After the storm they drove into town.

bb): Nach dem Sturm sind sie NICHT in die Stadt gefahren.

Sie wohnt im Haus neben dem Teich

aa) She lives in the house by the pond.

bb) Sie wohnt NICHT im Haus neben dem Teich.

In the last example, the two prepositional phrases are a logical unit, which does not apply to combinations like 'into town after the storm.' To determine which applies to a given sentence, one tries to put one of the prepositional phrases at the start of the English version::

* In the house she lives by the pond.

If the sentence is not acceptable, then the phrases are to be treated as a unit.

The above procedure takes several factors into account. Firstly, English and German do not place negation words in the same position. Secondly, English intonation calls for sentence stress on the informationally highest element, while German places it on the predicate complement, often irrespective of informational value, e.g.:

Er gibt uns das Buch
Er läuft in das Haus.
Er läuft in das Haus hinein.

Since negation is relevant to informational high points, English intonation is more revealing than German. Since NICHT precedes the informationally negated item, but NOT often doesn't, a transliteration of an English negative is not useful for determining the position of NICHT. My procedure responds to this complex of factors in the two languages. Since all speakers of English use much the same intonation patterns, the procedure is reliable, and does not demand so much learning of new material as becoming aware of what the American speaker already knows. Also, it is not necessary that the student understand why the procedure works. The abstract planning has been done by the instruction programmer, lessening the work at the other end.

Ideally, reinforcement with computer assistance would be possible whenever a series of steps, i.e. an algorithm, can be designed. Unless the steps are made

clear and compact, as I have tried to do with negation, the computer cannot efficiently interact with the student. In the first place, the student's response time would be too great, or rapidity would result in loss of focus. And in the seoond place, the algorithm allows the computer to perform the task on any input of the student, merely by duplicating the steps. If intonation is involved, the most practical computer equivalent would be the underlining mechanisms now available; it might also be possible to represent intonation acoustically, as in an oscilloscopic projection on a cathode ray tube.

The advantages of computer assistance over the unaided classroom are obvious in view of several problems discussed above. It accomodates differences in learning speed. By providing immediate feedback (in contrast to the graded quiz or written assignment), and by expanding that feedback when a student needs or requests it, it helps to reinforce the material in direct proportion to its respective complexity (in contrast to the textbook). By using gradated, multi-purpose programming, the computer practice integrates new concepts into what has been learned before, preventing losses and training the student to handle multiple foci. This also is impracticable in the limitations of class time and number of participants.

As Rockart and Scott-Morton (1975:77) have stated, the use of the computer is in itself not the main issue, but designing courseware:

> [...]the most fundamental "technology" that can assist the learning process is not computers, but the method or process by which we identify learning objectives and understand how to structure the material in light of these objectives.

It is one thing to use a language correctly, and quite another to program a computer to produce acceptable texts of that language. Anyone who has worked in this area realizes how difficult it can be to formalize one's own intuitions about language, and to debug the results. A computer is not intelligent and must be given precise directions for every step. It seems logical that experience gained in this sector

would be most useful in clarifying and mapping the teaching/learning process, especially if the passivity of our students under mass media influence continues to grow. At the same time, the initial added effort of the instructor designing language programs will soon result in a significant decrease in his or her purely mechanical work in the class. As Richard Barrutia (1969:15) has put it, teachers should free themselves for tasks only they can do, instead of spending so much time on tasks machines can and should do. The director of the Phoenix College TICCIT (Timesharing Interactive Computer Controlled Informational Television) Program, Fred Morrison (1975:5) sees the role of the teacher developing toward that of "an educational manager."

An illustration of this is the function of the instructor in co-ordinating classroom and computer tasks. Using on on-line interactive timesharing system with a reasonably adaptable language like APL or TUTOR, the computer could efficiently perform the reinforcement of structural aspects of the second language. The classroom would be the place to present communicational aspects, integrating the structural ones into processes of producing texts and utterances of the second language. In both situations a cumulative approach, encompassing stretches of discourse longer than the isolated sentence, should be maintained. Imaginitive and flexible programming would allow the computer to evaluate even such longer samples. Algorithms should be both interlingual, to point out specials areas of interference, and intra-lingual, such as changing sentences to a different tense, voice or mood. Also, it would be useful to present erroneous texts for the students to evaluate and correct, using errors of varying complexity; thus even the students' own mistakes are instructive rather than merely frustrating. Frequent mistakes also will alert the program designer to the need for new materials.

Quite apart from whatever specific improvements in second-language performance we may achieve, a learning experience of this nature would doubtless provide the

students with a heightened awareness of how languages work. This is borne out by the fact that much of what we know about language is a by-product of comparing actual languages, whether one thinks of the investigations of Old High German and Middle High German by the Grimms and the Junggrammatiker, or the formative experiences of such diverse modern linguists as the anthropologists, structuralists and neo-romantics with American Indian languages. In each case, striking differences and similarties between the foreign language and the investigator's own served to reveal hitherto unnoticed phenomena.

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